Road Safety Audits Can Reduce Fatalities

Historically, highway safety countermeasures have been developed in response to **traffic** accidents. These countermeasures are based on the identification of contributing factors in the system-operating environment that can be eliminated or changed so that the accidents caused by them will **be reduced or eliminated**. The road safety audit is a process whereby a team of **one or more independent, qualified examiners** attempts to identify features of the highway-operating environment that could be potentially dangerous **to road users and others affected by a road project. The objective is to ensure that measures to eliminate or reduce the problems are fully considered**

Road safety audits are **an efficient, cost effective and** proactive approach to improving transportation safety. With an estimate of over **40,000** fatalities resulting from motor vehicle crashes each year, the road safety audit (RSA) concept is a new and powerful tool for addressing safety deficiencies. Initiated in Great Britain in the 1980s, the RSA concept has proven to be highly effective in identifying and reducing the crash potential in the planning and design of roadway projects. The road safety audit, when used for applications on existing roads, is more appropriately termed a road safety audit review (RSAR).

Many experts say the road safety audit (RSA) has the potential to save lives and, ultimately, money. Road Safety Audit (RSA) is a relatively new tool for the North American transportation profession. It was developed as a process whereby safety is taken as an explicit consideration in the planning, design and operation of a transportation facility. This process, including the participants and their respective roles, has been well documented. RSA may be used on existing facilities (i.e., an in-service audit) but was primarily developed as a proactive safety tool to be used during the planning and design stages of a project.

Current North American RSA initiatives have been mainly pilot projects that are carried out as an "add-on service" to roadway design. The pilots have been somewhat distinct from the design process, and efforts have focused on the elements of RSA, the RSA process, and the audit team. In short, these initiatives have used RSA in isolation from the design process. As RSA becomes an accepted part of a road project, an equally important consideration is how to successfully integrate the RSA into the regular design process to minimize delays and wasted resources.

The WST2 Center is soliciting interest to sponsor a Road Safety Audit class later this summer or fall. If you have an interest in attending this class, learning more about Road Safety Audits and how your programs can benefit from this process, contact Dave Sorensen at (360) 705-7385 or email sorensd@wsdot.wa.gov.